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THE PROGRESS OF SCIENCE

THE UTILIZATION AND CONSERVATION OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES OF THE UNITED STATES

No part of the world is more richly endowed by nature with all that is necessary for the building of a great nation than the United States; where have these natural resources been used in a more wasteful and prodigal manner? Our nation has prospered, but at the expense of a much larger consumption and loss of its resources than was necessary, and we are now actually confronted with the question as to how long that which remains will avail to maintain us. Our civilization is as dependent on power, light, heat, metals, lumber and other material supplies, as it is on the air we breathe, and, if it is to endure, we must quickly recognize that the utilization of these necessities must be based upon the greatest economy compatible with effectiveness.

Reared in the midst of national abundance, the idea has become a matter of common expression that when our present resources are gone "something else will be found to take their place," or that because we have not as yet suffered for the want of any of them, the time will never come when the nation will suffer in consequence of our past and present prodigality. But whatever may be the advances of applied science, the resources that nature supplies will always be needed.

The natural wealth that we have inherited from the past is far from inexhaustible, and for this generation to pass away leaving a depleted heritage for those to come, with which to maintain and advance the civilization that we have here developed, would be a folly and a grievous iniquity.

Much that is called development is really destructive exploitation; much that we call production is really consumption; much that we call utilization is merely the sacrifice for small immediate profits of things that will be badly needed in the future. Nature has been so lavish with us that we have not felt the necessity of looking at these facts in their true light, but our nation and our civilization must have a future as well as a past.

It seems, therefore, to be an important duty of scientific men to disseminate information and instruction as to the real condition of our natural resources; to warn the nation where danger of exhaustion lies, and in the light of the best scientific and practical knowledge that we now possess, and through new researches directed to this end, to teach the ways in which our resources may best be maintained. These great economic problems are so involved with industrial, financial and political questions that little direct influence can be exerted without a long educational campaign. This will in time bear fruit, but the longer the time that will be required, the more important is an immediate beginning. Exact scientific knowledge alone can guide in this large field, but even science can not take care of industrial waste. Such correction can be made only by an enlightened moral sense.

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

At the instance of the National Academy of Sciences, a committee of that body, and similar committees appointed by the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Research Council have held two meetings at the American Museum of Natural History in New